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TRUE SOURCE OF AMERICAN WEALTH.

BY THE HON. BEN. F. CLAYTON, PRESIDENT OF THE FARMERS'
NATIONAL CONGRESS.

WE have no disposition to discuss, in a magazine article, the true source of wealth from a scientific standpoint. We shall ignore the well-beaten path of political economists. The conflict between these scientific gentlemen over finespun theories and doubtful propositions as to natural laws governing mankind in their relation one to the other, and the application of these laws in the production and distribution of wealth, are no nearer settled now than at the close of the last century. Notwithstanding the many unsettled details between economic writers, we are disposed, in the main, to recognize Political Economy as a science, but we are not willing to accept all theoretical deductions as conclusive, for theory often comes in conflict with truth when confronted by practical questions growing out of our great industrial and productive interests. In fact, we think that the science of economy has had but little to do with the accumulations of the vast wealth of the American people. It is a question whether one in fifty of our progressive financiers has ever made a study of the science of Political Economy. Success is not always coupled with an abstract theory, and many of the most successful have learned more from the great book of nature and from practical experience, than they have from all the ethical deductions of the scientific writings from the days of Pliny and Charlemagne to the days of Adam Smith and Mr. Carey.

Every chapter of our eventful history, colonial and national, is intensely interesting to our own people, as well as a great surprise to the people of the old world, and yet, the results attained are perfectly natural when we consider the perfection of the two

elements that produce wealth, and their complete co-operation on the American continent. In 1820, when the act of Congress was passed for the distribution of public lands there was general dissatisfaction. It was claimed that under that policy it would be several hundred years before the government would find market for its public domain. Less than seventy years ago, in 1827, the land department reported that it would require 500 years to exhaust the public lands, and some of the states insisted that nine-tenths of it would never be sold. Since that time the government, by purchase and by conquest, has added 1,500,000 square miles of new territory, and so lavish has been the demand that the land department reports that all available lands for agricultural purposes have been practically exhausted. The Indian tribes are being forced to smaller bounds to accommodate our growing population, and when tribal lands are thrown on the market, so great has been the rush for homesteads that it has required the presence of the United States army to protect the weak from the strong, in their mad efforts for choice homes. Every tract of government land that can be utilized for farming purposes has been taken. Local and national irrigation conventions are being held. Congress has been petitioned and has instructed the best engineers attainable to investigate the feasibility of water storage and a systematic irrigation for the reclamation of the arid districts to make room for our constantly increasing requirements.

Drawing his conclusions from the United States report of 1880, Mr. Mulhall, ten years ago, gave the annual accumulations of wealth of the four great nations as follows :

United States, \$825,000,000 ; France, \$375,000,000 ; Great Britain, \$325,000,000 ; Germany, \$200,000,000.

He then says : " The American people gained more wealth from 1870 to 1880 than Great Britain had gained in all her previous history."

Mr. Mulhall is probably the most profound and best authenticated statistician known to our language—a man raised under a different political atmosphere from ours, with the usual prejudices of his countrymen, governed by a different policy to that of ours, and yet he is absolutely impartial. In a recent contribution to the *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, on the " Power and Wealth of the United States," he declares : " We find nothing to compare with the United States in this present year of 1895 ;" and

he further says: "The wealth of the American people surpasses that of any other nation past or present."

While the eminent philosopher indicates that our phenomenal increase of wealth has been the result of circumstances, and that the new world might have turned those circumstances to a greater advantage, he proceeds to lay before his readers the fact, verified by statistics, that: "An ordinary farm-hand in the United States raises as much grain as five men" engaged in like occupation in the old world. He seems to deplore that condition of things and attributes it to the want in other countries of mechanical appliances such as we use in the United States. This admission is discreditable to the intelligence and the opportunities of the old world, and especially so to Great Britain, possessed with ample means to develop her immediate productive resources as well as those of her boundless dependencies. It is equally complimentary to the American people that they have been able within a single lifetime to so intelligently utilize the forces of nature as to compel her soil to yield such marvellous wealth.

The census reports show that our per capita increase in wealth has been from \$205 in 1820 to \$1,039 in 1890. The increase in the wealth of the nation in the same time has been from \$1,960,000,000 to \$65,027,000,000, which has since been increased to approximately \$70,000,000,000.

The civilized world stands amazed at the vast accumulations of the American people, and the query from home and abroad is from whence it came, and what is its true source?

We answer that our success is due to two agencies, both of which the American people possess in the highest degree, namely, labor and its intelligent application to the richest natural resources of any country. In the consideration of the true source of our national wealth we must combine these two elements as one and inseparable. Man must furnish labor and nature must furnish all the material upon which labor is expended. Our labor has always been of the highest type, from the fact that the people of the United States are the remote, if not the direct, descendants of a representative foreign element that had learned to think for itself, and when debarred from acting for itself, to seek a country of equal social and political rights where it could plant the banner of the largest freedom and where

it could enjoy to the fullest extent the fruits of its own labor. Our population is made up of an energetic class that is willing to leave the scenes of childhood, the home of youth, the mother tongue and native land to cast their fortunes with a strange people. The American citizen, whether native or foreign born, is quick to recognize the rights of all who would come to our shores to better their condition and to throw around them all the safeguards of protection in every social and political right. From the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers there has been a healthful growth in the spirit of freedom, morality, industry and economy. The environments that surround the American citizen are antagonistic to royal exclusiveness. They regard labor as respectable and measure men by the standard of virtue and personal worth.

This independent and industrious class of people, venturing upon our shores, found a country ready to respond to intelligent and well directed labor. Before civilization reached our continent its natural resources were as great as now. In its forest and on its broad plain, and confined within its rich soil, were found the elements to sustain the same number of people as now. It was a vast country—a country of magnificent natural resources, from which has been harvested the results that astonish ourselves. Mr. Jefferson, while President of the young republic, laid before his people, then fringing the edges of the great continent, a graphic picture of its interior resources. He transmitted to the Congress of the United States documents vindicating him from the attacks of his political enemies because of the Louisiana purchase. These papers are highly interesting, and contained the first information that civilization ever had of this new acquisition. They were printed by order of Congress and discussed by the press of the day, the sage of Monticello being unmercifully criticised.

Highly embellished as his descriptions seem to have been, they were nearer in accord with the results since obtained, than was the report of General Fremont and other government officials who placed this country on the map as an unproductive desert.

The people who made an attack upon the President little dreamed of the possibilities that would result from his action in the purchase, or that within its bounds there was a natural

territory susceptible of cultivation to a point of becoming the greatest grain and food producing country on the earth. Glowing and fanciful as the picture may seem, the results have far surpassed the most sanguine imagination of the President.

The productive resources of one state comprised in the purchase, for the year 1892, was valued at \$468,878,000, or more than thirty-one times the cost of the entire tract. The Federal census of 1890 reveals the following facts with reference to Iowa products :

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Oats, corn, hay and wheat..... | \$198,869,000 |
| Cattle, hogs and horses..... | 184,424,000 |
| Dairy product..... | 37,000,000 |
| Total..... | \$420,293,000 |

For the first fifty years of our national existence agriculture in its various forms was almost the universal occupation of its people. In that time they laid the foundation for the complexities of modern life as we see it to-day in diversified labor. "The civilized man in his first beginning was farmer, carpenter, mason, merchant and manufacturer—complete, though primitive, in the individual. But he was a farmer first and foremost, and used the other avocations merely as incidentals to this first and chief employment. Less than a half century has elapsed since the spinning wheel and the loom were common and necessary in the home."

They lived entirely within their own resources, built their own cabins, and constructed the huge fire-place and chimney. A portion of the field was set aside for the flax, and when it had been pulled, bleached and broken, it was manufactured into cloth to supply the needs of the family ; the fleece produced on the farm was submitted to the various processes of preparation necessary and made into clothing without leaving the home. The skins and the furs of animals were tanned by the farmer and converted into shoes for himself and family, and all his energies were in the direction to secure the product from which his wants must be supplied. Since then the inventive genius has been called into activity and has so divided and diversified employment as to revolutionize the condition of things. "But the basal relations remain unchanged, and agriculture as an antecedent presses her claims of precedence with even greater relentless sternness."

Dotted over our vast country are the towns and cities with

the ceaseless din of factories and the hurry and bustle of trade and traffic. The quiet of every community is disturbed day and night by the busy wheels of commerce as the railways sweep in every direction over their steel trackage in transit to seaboard cities, laden with the rich product of the American farm. In the busy marts are found the employees of ship lines, the transportation companies, the grain elevators, and the clerks of the banking and shipping houses, all handling or re-working the raw material gathered from the forest or the field, and from which the world must be clothed, fed and warmed. This vast army of mechanics, the arts, the trades and the professions, have contributed to a higher perfection of our productive industries ; but they are not direct producers of wealth, they are consumers. But these elements must ever remain the true source of wealth, and the solid foundation upon which rests the beautiful and magnificent temple of our success. The natural product of the soil, aided by intelligent labor, is the great creative force, the only source from which wealth may be obtained to meet all obligations. The street car fare, interest on bonds, dividends on stocks, the soldiers' pension, the fees of the professional, the dry goods and grocery bills, as well as the cost of conducting all the intricate machinery of the government, must be paid by the revenues from the soil. The product of the gold and silver mines is valuable only because of the commerce and the wealth created from the soil by the co-operation of labor and nature's fertility. One year of total failure of the products of the earth, and wreck and ruin, starvation and death would be the inevitable results. That the United States finds herself the wealthiest nation on the earth at the end of the first hundred years of her existence is a proud fact. When we consider the high type of citizenship and the nobility of labor with which the country has been blessed, we should not be surprised that our increase in wealth "can be measured at each national census with almost the same precision as that with which the astronomer indicates the distance of the heavenly bodies."

BEN. F. CLAYTON.